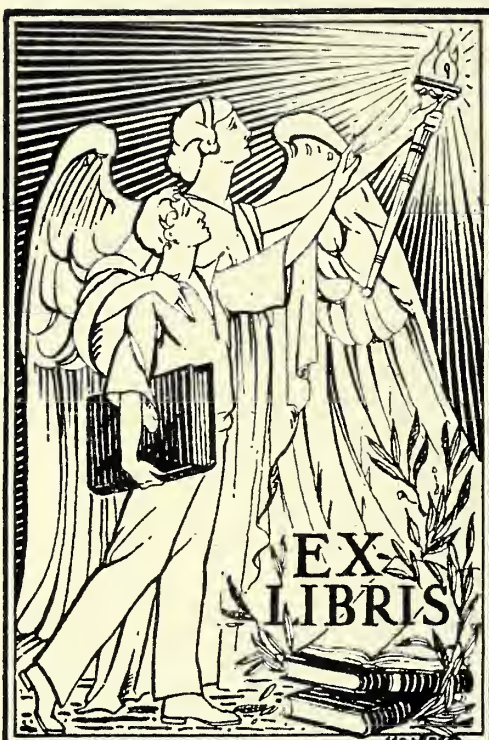


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# **THE RIGHT TO KNOW**

**The Canadian National Institute  
for the Blind**

1931 Bayview Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4G 4C8

**NOVEMBER 1988**

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND  
15 WEST 16th STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10011

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# **THE RIGHT TO KNOW TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP**

- \* **Mr. James W. Sanders, Project Chairperson, Executive Director, CNIB  
B.C./Yukon Division, Vancouver**
- \* **Mr. Bruce Clark, Executive Director, The Canadian Council of the Blind,  
London, Ont.**
- \* **Mrs. Fran Cutler, Director, CBC Northern Radio Services, Ottawa**
- \* **Mr. Andre Hamel, Executive Director, La Magnetothèque, Montreal**  
**Mr. Claude Lewis, Vice-President, Market Development, Canadian Satellite  
Communications Inc., CANCOM, Toronto**  
**Mr. Edward Mannion, Communications Consultant, Toronto**  
**Mr. Kip Moorecroft, Vice-President, Programming, Rogers Cable T.V.,  
Toronto**
- \* **Mr. Harry Monk, Communications Director, Status of Disabled Persons Secretariat,  
Federal Secretary of State, Ottawa**
- \* **Dr. Gerald Neufeld, Professor, Department of Linguistics, University of Ottawa**  
**Mr. Ralph Scharf, Dean, Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology,  
Brantford, Ont.**

**In addition, the technical specialists who have consulted with the Task Force are listed in  
Appendix I.**

- \* **Visually impaired members**



# **THE RIGHT TO KNOW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **BACKGROUND**

The year 1829 saw the publication of a system of reading and writing by touch. Braille remains the only international tactile standard for information transmission, storage and retrieval.

In Canada today over 500,000 people are unable to participate, to the fullest extent possible, because they are unable to read print due to blindness or a significant visual impairment.

New technological developments now offer blind and visually impaired persons access to improved systems of communication which are reflected in this vital report on information access planning.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Advocacy and Awareness**

1. that CNIB undertake leadership in Canada to establish a partnership with consumer groups of blind and visually impaired persons, the general public and private sectors, to establish an active advocacy role to ensure that the communication and information access requirements of blind and visually impaired Canadians are represented in every possible public forum. (Page 9)

### **B. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Broadcast Reading Service - A Newsstand for the Blind**

2. that CNIB undertake leadership to establish a Canadian broadcast reading service in partnership with the Federal Government. (Page 12)

### **C. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Community Information**

3. that the Information Access Implementation Group (IAIG, established in the implementation plan of recommendation 1) develop a model for delivering extended telephone information services to blind and visually impaired Canadians. (Page 15)
4. that following implementation of a Broadcast Reading Service, the IAIG should test the establishment of a complementary service via telephone access, e.g. Talking Newspaper for the Blind. (Page 15)

#### **D. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Government Information**

5. that CNIB and consumer groups work with the Federal Government to take leadership in Canada for establishing policies and procedures to ensure access to government information for blind and visually impaired persons. (Page 17)

#### **E. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Living Independently**

6. that CNIB enhance its policy and program of communication with blind and visually impaired Canadians with respect to living with vision loss. (Page 19)
7. that a National Braille Forum be established with membership from consumers, parents, educators, and producers. (Page 19)

#### **F. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Learning Independently**

8. that Provincial/Territorial education authorities must ensure that integrated and accessible learning systems and resources for blind and visually impaired students be available to students within their jurisdiction. (Page 21)

#### **G. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Library Systems**

9. that the library system of Canada must establish access to information for blind and visually impaired Canadians as an immediate priority. (Page 23)

#### **H. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Innovative Present and Future Systems**

10. that the Information Access Implementation Group must ensure that appropriate monitoring and assessment of growing and new technologies be regularly conducted. (Page 26)

### **SUMMARY**

- I. Establishing access to information to blind and visually impaired persons is a complex, dynamic process. The Task Force has tried to “stop time” in order to review the major elements of this process as they exist “now.” However, time does not stop and dynamic systems require evaluation that provides for anticipated growth and change in the influence of currently unique and/or isolated processes.
- II. Action to be taken on each of the above recommendations is outlined in the implementation section of the report which follows each recommendation.



# FOREWORD

The year 1829 saw the publication of a system of reading and writing by touch. Louis Braille and his ingenious invention became the practical and symbolic beginning to independent access to information by blind persons throughout the world. Braille remains the most significant communications system for blind and visually impaired persons and the only international tactile standard for information transmission, storage and retrieval. However, on its own, it is no longer sufficient.

Technological developments over the past decade have allowed for unprecedented and instant access to print oriented materials which, in turn, have created a two-fold threat to communications by blind persons - access to sufficient information to be a knowledgeable consumer; and obtaining that information in a timely and practical manner. For blind persons, the information clock is now running in reverse.

Dr. Euclid Herie, Managing Director, The Canadian National Institute for the Blind, challenged the public and private sector to find alternatives to the present dilemma which tries to solve blind persons' present and future information needs with yesterday's technology. CNIB and the Federal Secretary of State, Status of Disabled Persons Secretariat, accepted that challenge. A blue ribbon committee composed of blind persons, leaders from the communications industry and specialists in blindness, volunteered their time, skill and knowledge to create "*The Right to Know*." This document is a "blueprint" for incorporating a system to close the information gap now experienced by blind and visually impaired persons.

As this report is being written, new technological developments further threaten the modest breakthroughs made in the past decade and even the recommendations contained herein. This magnitude of advancement challenged our working group to anticipate the near future and formulate a systems approach to incorporating both processes and devices into the fabric of information access planning.

*The Right to Know* Task Force strongly believes that the following represents a re-awakening, not an end. Never again can we take for granted that technology will automatically enable blind persons to keep pace. We challenge governments, industry, rehabilitation specialists and blind persons to work together to revive and maintain the vision of Louis Braille, who believed that everyone has "the right to know."

On behalf of CNIB, I wish to thank all participants.

James W. Sanders,  
Chairman

# INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right of every Canadian to participate to the fullest, as a citizen. Full participation is predicated upon having the power to make decisions, to judge and evaluate, and to learn. The power to participate stems from knowledge; knowledge gained through becoming and staying informed.

*Today however, over 500,000 Canadians are systemically disempowered from full participation by virtue of their inability to read print due to blindness or a significant visual impairment.*

Print and visual images are fundamental elements of information exchange. Print, in all of its forms, is a most significant obstacle to visually impaired people. Without regular and complete access to the printed word, visually impaired Canadians cannot inform themselves well enough to secure the detail they need to make informed decisions.

Modern technology and communication processes place an ever-increasing premium on visual information sources. The television medium has fulfilled the adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. When limited visual information processing is combined with an inability to read print, the systemic limitations to becoming informed create an obstacle of staggering proportions.

Canada is a world leader with respect to information dissemination. We have the widest distribution of cable television of any country, a telephone system second to none, and have taken computer communications to the leading edge. We have established policies to minimize the information limits of the hearing impaired, and we communicate effectively to remote parts of this very large nation, in several languages. We have ultra-sophisticated communication satellites and ground stations facilitating many of these processes. *Yet we have not addressed the visually impaired’s “right to know.”*

Commissioned by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and jointly funded by the CNIB and the Federal Secretary of State, Status of the Disabled Person Secretariat, “*The Right to Know*” is a considered and provocative consensus of blind and visually impaired Canadians, service providers, and communication industry leaders. It provides a blueprint for planning information access for the 2 percent of Canadians currently unable to become fully informed citizens.



**The Task Force examined who visually impaired people are, what they want to know, what communication processes they currently use in Canada and around the world, what communication technology exists and is expected, and how to combine these factors under the following criteria. The system recommended by *"The Right to Know"* must:**

- 1. reach as many people as possible;**
- 2. respond to both the general and specific information requirements of the users;**
- 3. demonstrate a significant participation of blind and visually impaired Canadians; and,**
- 4. minimize the technical knowledge required of the average user.**

**The specific details and statistics in support of the plan are contained in the Task Force commissioned report, *"A Question of Access,"* CNIB, June 1988. Members of the Task Force are listed at the front of this report and major contributors are listed in Appendix 1.**

**The Task Force concludes that Canada must not continue to ignore the disadvantages of a visual impairment on Canadians with respect to their rightful and wanted place in Canadian society. The incorporation of the following plan will provide the opportunity for this large and growing segment of our population to attain and maintain the status of fully participating citizens of Canada.**





**A retired couple enjoying a talking book together.**

**Reading for information or leisure: fundamental activities for all citizens. To secure information from print, accommodations for blind and visually impaired persons are essential.**

**Studying with low vision.**





## **A. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Advocacy and Awareness**

Members of the Access to Information Task Force from outside the field of blindness were most perplexed by their limited knowledge of visual impairment and the barriers to information access. It was clear in their view, and readily supported by the rest of the group that public attention must be drawn to the circumstances of visual impairment in the form of active advocacy toward removing the access barriers. Through the research conducted in *"A Question of Access"* (CNIB - June 1988), the information from technical advisors, and the deliberations of the members, the Task Force became aware of the significant information access limitations faced by blind and visually impaired individuals. The Task Force focused on why this situation exists and how to use existing and anticipated systems and technologies to alleviate, if not remove, the obstacles.

In an effort to evaluate the benefit of a concentrated advocacy program, the experience of hearing impaired persons was reviewed. Noted specifically here: the growing frequency of closed-captioning on television programming, of sign language interpreters in public forums, and of volume adjustable telephone receivers in public buildings. The modest accommodations were seen by the Task Force as indicative of public awareness and acceptance. They were achieved as a result of concentrated advocacy efforts by and for hearing impaired individuals.

The Task Force recognizes that no one group can nor should take responsibility for providing such an advocacy program for the visually impaired. However, CNIB has the facility to undertake leadership in assembling the necessary partners to accomplish a comparable level of sensitivity.

An example of this type of endeavour was the representations made by the CNIB and consumer groups toward encouraging the establishment of accessible signage in Ministry of Transport facilities. As signage is an important source of information, the Task Force encourages the current efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. *that CNIB undertake leadership in Canada to establish a partnership with consumer groups of blind and visually impaired persons, and the public and private sectors to establish an active advocacy role. This will ensure that the communication and information access requirements of blind and visually impaired Canadians are represented in every possible public forum.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. that an Information Access Implementation Group (IAIG) be established with membership from CNIB, consumer groups of blind and visually impaired Canadians, relevant agencies or departments of government and leaders from the communication industry. This group would:
  - a) advocate for, develop and/or review plans for projects involving access to information by blind and visually impaired persons;
  - b) advise on the implementation of publicly sponsored projects for access to information;
  - c) undertake and foster active advocacy for the right of visually impaired Canadians to know; and,
  - d) monitor the developments of new technology to ensure that all access to information systems are current.
2. The IAIG should include representatives from CNIB management, the largest consumer groups, relevant government departments and agencies and should:
  - a) act for a three year period;
  - b) seek associates suitable to assist with specified projects; and,
  - c) select a Chairperson from their membership.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

CNIB should establish the leadership for assembling representatives of the consumer groups, the policy makers, and industry.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The full cost for these initiatives is unknown but the cost for the IAIG for five years is estimated to be \$250,000.00.



## **B. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Broadcast Reading Service - A Newsstand for the Blind**

The results of the research in "*A Question of Access*" and the knowledge and experience of the Task Force clearly identified current affairs (or time-sensitive material) as the fundamental information source sought by visually impaired individuals. Not surprisingly, it is the same material demanded by sighted people - information that would be found at a print newsstand.

Beyond conventional news delivery broadcasts, newspapers, magazines and other periodicals are highly desirable and often necessary vehicles for distributing general information, advertising, and leisure material. They are virtually all in print except for a few publications that are transcribed onto audio tape. Even fewer are published in braille or large print.

Statistics from "*A Question of Access*" clearly showed that the loss of vision presented the individual with a significant disassociation from their community (page 117). Many cited the loss of access to the newspaper and magazines as the cause. Despite the significant information sources of the broadcast media, blind and visually impaired citizens are prevented from independently reading the information of their preference, at their convenience, in a media that is accessible to them.

During the Task Force deliberations, several options for initially addressing the widest possible information distribution were examined. The CNIB National Library and other libraries provide a well-respected service and the private and public broadcast systems serve a very large part of the general population, but this does not begin to address all the information needs of visually impaired persons.

Of the systems specifically designed for visually impaired persons, the broadcast reading services in Europe, Australia, and the United States were reviewed. The French language Canadian broadcast reading service in Quebec, La Magnetothèque was represented on the Task Force. These systems are all characterized by having volunteers read print publications for the benefit of those who are print handicapped. The materials are either read live and recorded or recorded for replay at specified programmed intervals. All systems strive to provide variety while trying to ensure that the most popular materials are regularly available.

The existing broadcast reading services are distributed via live "on-air" signal, an FM side-band (requiring in-home specialized receivers) or FM sub-carrier distributed by communication satellite and cable television (requiring in-home cable television outlets). The first two options are limited by either broadcast range and/or cost. The latter can provide the greatest range in service provided cable television is well distributed. La Magnetothèque uses the cable television distribution process in the Province of Quebec.

Given the vast reaches of Canada that a generic information distribution system must achieve, the breadth of the information preferences of 500,000 people, and that the majority of visually impaired Canadians are elderly, the process must try to reach as many people as possible, and minimize the cost of the process and user cost; it must be flexible enough to provide the desired national and local information, and be easy to operate.

From the foregoing and on the basis of the Canadian experience of La Magnetotheque, satellite distribution through cable television would address the requirements of this system. As previously noted, Canada has the widest distribution of cable television of any country in the world, and excellent communication satellite systems.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

2. *that CNIB undertake leadership to establish a Canadian broadcast reading service in partnership with the Federal Government.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. The IAIG would oversee the development of this service, consulting with and calling upon appropriate resources such as:
  - a) members of consumer groups;
  - b) members of policy and regulatory agencies of the Federal Government;
  - c) representatives of the cable television industry;
  - d) representatives of the satellite communication industry;
  - e) management and volunteers of an appropriate branch of CNIB;
  - f) representatives of the telephone industry; and,
  - g) La Magnetotheque of Quebec.
2. This Planning Committee should work to establish local groups whose membership and efforts would parallel the national group to establish:
  - a) local content programming for insertion on the national system; and,
  - b) long term local support of the system.
3. The Planning Committee should establish a formal structure of paid and/or volunteer staff to deliver the service.
4. At an appropriate date, the viability of a satellite ground station should be examined to facilitate the re-broadcast of popular international materials from United States-based satellite transmitted reading services.

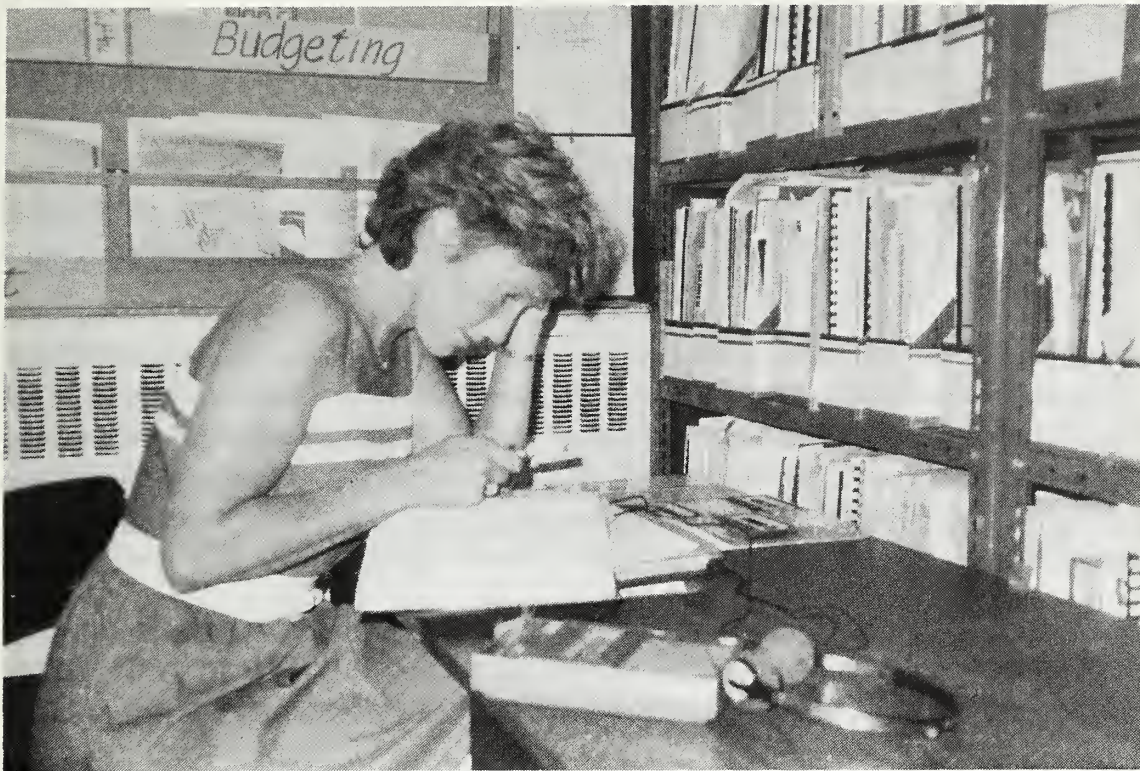
## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

Initial leadership would come from the CNIB and the Federal Government. Subsequent responsibility would rest with the implementation recommendations of the IAIG.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The estimated full cost for five years is \$1,000,000.00.

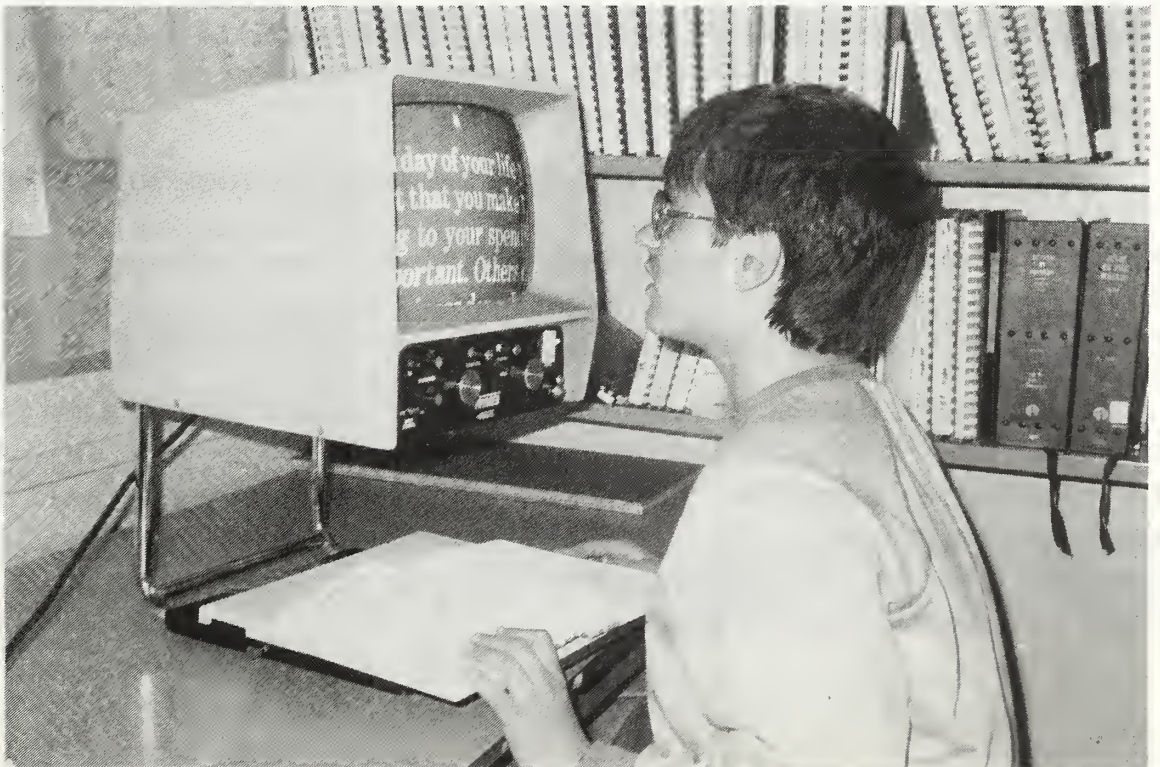




A government researcher reading and recording facts.

Employees and students have demanding information needs and often are required to use several combinations of adaptive devices to access printed materials.

Using closed circuit television reading devices provides access to print and graphic materials.





## **C. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Community Information**

As indicated in the preceding section, local community-based information was deemed fundamental by the vast majority of those surveyed in *"A Question of Access"*. While the broadcast reading service will offer new and welcome access to this type of detail, it also presents some inherent constraints toward desired independence.

The nature of a broadcast reading service requires that it be programmed to serve the greatest number of listeners at the most popular listening hours. Scheduling and programming requirements will reduce the flexibility of the system to serve working people, students or others on their own schedule. Additionally, the broadcast reading service strives to serve the majority, therefore more eclectic and/or obscure tastes may not be addressed more than minimally, if at all.

Those factors, plus the need for cable TV access describe the limitations of designing only one system to provide information access to blind and visually impaired persons. For this under-served population, the broadcast reading service is a vital beginning.

Complementary systems to the broadcast reading service were actively sought and researched by the Task Force and led to the conclusion that the most independent information tool available is the telephone. The permeation of telephone service is virtually complete in Canada. The "phone" is the single most common communication link to independent information access.

This conclusion led to the investigation of an innovative system called *"Newspapers for the Blind,"* operating in its second year in Flint, Michigan. Using the best of computer and telephone technology, the system delivers up to 85 percent of the Flint daily newspaper through human quality computer recording to individual users over their own telephone, at their convenience.

The subscriber merely dials the phone, is prompted by voice to enter their user number, and subsequently the number of the section of the paper they wish to "read." They can listen as long as they wish and/or advance to any other section of the paper by pressing the buttons on their touch-tone telephone. The system depends upon volunteer readers, uses sophisticated yet common hardware, and requires very little space.

Although the Flint project uses the newspaper, the technology is not limited only to that source of information. Virtually any information source required by several people could be distributed using the techniques of the "talking newspaper". This system is particularly convenient. It is quite possible to have the system support remote access, or establish a distant sub-station that can be administered by long distance, removing the need for users to pay toll charges.

The Task Force considered other information sources commonly addressed by the "phone." Most telephone companies have recognized that blind people cannot use the telephone directory and have waived the normal charges for directory assistance consultations requested by a blind customer. However, this concession does not offer access to other published details like addresses and Yellow Pages advertising.

Further research into the telephone system led to the discovery of a new system of information distribution instituted in a few jurisdictions and planned for others. Entitled "*InTouch*," this system uses technology similar to the "Talking Newspaper". It delivers a myriad of short, pre-recorded computer-stored messages in human quality voice accessed by voice command or by using the touch-tone keys of the user's telephone. The information varies from the daily television listings, through local news, weather, and sports to a community events schedule; as many as 70 different subjects with access codes are advertised in the local telephone directory. The system is also experimenting with using the technology to offer voice-oriented Yellow Pages advertising.

In consideration of the foregoing, the Task Force concluded that expanding the use of the telephone system to blind and visually impaired persons is crucial and practical for providing access to information regularly available in the community.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

3. *that the IAIG develop a model for delivering extended telephone information services to blind and visually impaired Canadians.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

Consumers, CNIB, and selected representatives of telephone companies should research, design and recommend a model of access to be presented to telephone companies.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

The Information Access Implementation Group.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The cost is unknown but is expected to be minimal.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

4. *that following implementation of a Broadcast Reading Service, the IAIG should test the establishment of a complementary service via telephone access, e.g. Talking Newspaper for the Blind.*





Government requires citizen participation in many activities. With proper access, responsibilities such as voting are capably managed independently.

Canada Post delivers braille and audio tape to and from blind and visually impaired persons - POST FREE





## **D. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Government Information**

Fulfilling the requirements of citizenship demands that individuals have regular and complete access to statutory information produced and distributed by governments at all levels. Government has accepted this responsibility by ensuring that materials are available in both official languages, are distributed through public information systems like newspapers, broadcast media, government and Crown corporation offices and on request. Few documents are available in the alternate media of audio tape, braille or large print, with the notable exceptions of the Income Tax Guide and the Charter of Rights.

All levels of government deliver important services. In order to make full use of those services, people seek information published by the appropriate agency. Government actively seeks the participation of the population in many ways: elections, public enquiries, hearings, census etc. The Task Force recognized that some accommodations are made.

Canada Post was the first postal authority in the world to recognize the unique requirements of blind and visually impaired persons. They continue to provide "postage free" first class delivery of audio tape and braille material to and from blind persons. They also offer a telephone information line for researching postal codes.

The information available from government is very important but so is leadership in developing policies and procedures for distribution of that information. With a concerted program of providing access, the advocacy requirements identified in section A will be significantly supported. The Federal Government's leadership to this end will have great influence on their provincial, territorial and municipal counterparts, as well as the general public. (Further comments regarding the Provincial Government appear under section F, "Learning Independently").

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

5. *that CNIB and consumer groups work with the Federal Government to take leadership in Canada for establishing policies and procedures to ensure access to government information for blind and visually impaired persons.*



## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. Through the Treasury Board develop and implement a policy of producing information documents in alternate media upon request.
2. Through the Department of Supply and Services, develop and maintain an inventory of suppliers to produce alternate media materials as required. The inventory would be made available to all Federal departments and agencies for their use.
3. Through the Treasury Board, establish a policy of regularly advertising the availability of transcribed alternate media materials.
4. Through the Public Service Commission, establish a policy of ensuring that job support materials and technical access devices for employees of the Public Service are routinely considered as essential.
5. Through the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, establish a policy of ensuring that job support materials and technical access devices for employees involved in federally sponsored employment and training-on-the-job programs are routinely considered as essential.
6. Through all departments, establish a policy of leadership and advocacy with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to develop similar accessibility.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

CNIB, consumer groups, Federal Government departments, agencies and Crown corporations.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The cost is unknown.

## **E. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Living Independently**

Losing most or all of one's vision, or being born with little or no sight affects each individual in a unique way. Being blind or visually impaired does not automatically make one's hearing better. It does not mean that one will want, need or even be able to learn braille. Blindness and visual impairment are not limited by age, race, creed, colour, religion, social standing, health or education.

Learning to live with vision loss is seldom accomplished alone, especially when the fundamental elements of learning are predicated upon print and visual images. Helping to empower people with independence is significantly hampered by the limits of the public information processes to allow alternate access. Even the helping agencies and consumer sponsored groups have disparate communication systems available to their constituents.

Blind and visually impaired persons want and need to know more about all aspects of living with vision loss. Specific information on technology, rehabilitation and training opportunities, and adaptive devices for use in daily living are fundamental.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

6. *that CNIB enhance its policy and program of communication with blind and visually impaired Canadians with respect to living with vision loss.*

The Task Force was aware of a recent CNIB meeting, Braille: Future Directions, which brought together educators, parents, producers, librarians, consumers, and government representatives. Recognizing the importance of braille, the Task Force supports the following:

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

7. *that a National Braille Forum be established with membership from consumers, parents, educators, and producers.*

### **IMPLEMENTATION:**

This group would:

- a) advocate for and promote the use of braille;
- b) research, develop and promote technological access to braille materials; and,
- c) advocate for the availability of braille books for sale at the same price as print material.

### **RESPONSIBILITY:**

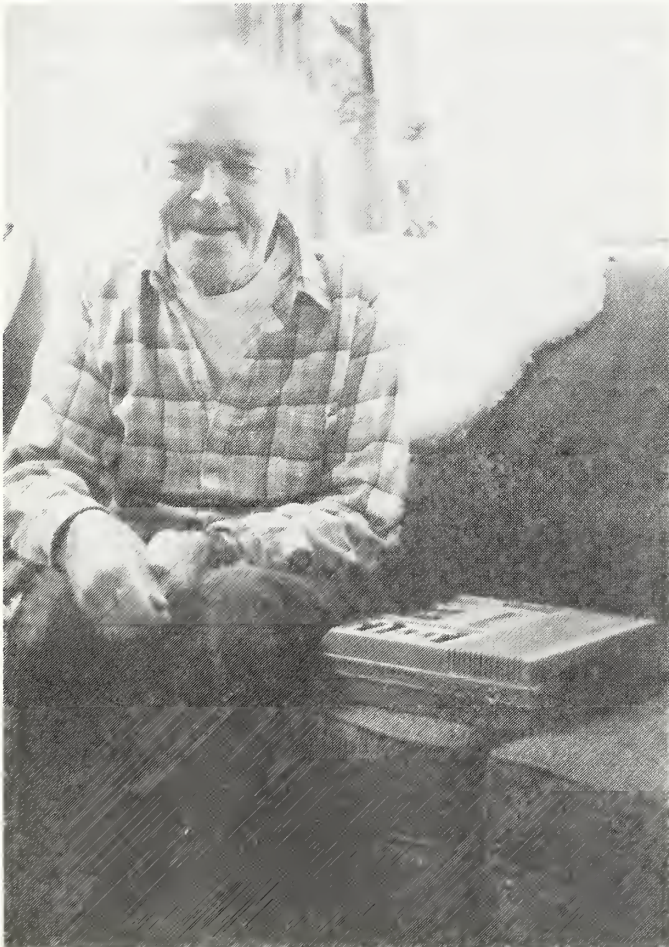
The CNIB assume leadership in assembling representatives of the consumer groups, the policy makers and industry.

### **ESTIMATED COST:**

The full cost for these initiatives is unknown.



**Information sources are many and varied. Even the most routine tasks require some accommodations to the print source.**



**Audio tape reproduction of original print is the most popular and welcome alternate media for the majority of blind and visually impaired Canadians. Novels, magazines and learning materials are available.**

## **F. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Learning Independently**

The survey of Education Services conducted for the Task Force revealed several incongruities and inconsistencies in the levels of support and instruction to blind and visually impaired children and young adults. Preparation for adulthood, development of life-long learning and reading skills, and availability of materials and equipment suitable for the needs of the user varied so dramatically that it was alarming to the Task Force members.

The fact that many of the educational support services are extended as a result of “mainstreaming” into the regular classroom environment has created a need for itinerant teaching services which may or may not exist in many jurisdictions. The importance of this support is very evident from the positive impact attained in areas where this intervention is consistently available.

Post-secondary education and continuing education come under various jurisdictions. The reading needs of these students are often greater, course outlines vary greatly, textbooks are constantly changed, and alternate media production resources are minimally available. These needs must be addressed immediately.

Technology is making significant impact on the delivery of instructional services at all levels. An ever-increasing amount of information is being electronically produced and presented to students. Visually impaired and blind students must be provided competitive access to those materials, either in the classroom and/or through the evolution of distance education.

There are other statistics that the Task Force considered significant. The nature of employment secured by blind and visually impaired individuals has changed, increasing particularly in the number of people entering professional/technical occupations (*A Question of Access*, page 17). While over 50 percent of the people surveyed by CNIB have less than full high school education, over 20 percent have secured post-secondary certification (*A Question of Access*, page 14).

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

8. *that Provincial/Territorial education authorities ensure that integrated and accessible learning systems and resources for blind and visually impaired students be available to students within their jurisdiction.*



## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. In conjunction with the National Braille Forum (previously recommended), significantly improve the level of braille instruction and alternate media materials production within their jurisdiction:
  - a) establish production facilities and/or a list of suppliers of alternate media materials to be used by all levels and jurisdictions within the province.
2. Initiate and/or augment the supply of, and instruction for, technical assistive devices at all educational levels including distance education programs:
  - a) seek expertise to assist in the coordination and implementation of a comprehensive acquisition and distribution program; and,
  - b) seek and develop assessment expertise to ensure the appropriateness of equipment for students.
3. Establish a program for routinely supplying alternate media learning materials by:
  - a) ensuring that production systems and standards are available to all students; and,
  - b) routinely report the production and availability of all materials in alternate media on the National Library of Canada Database, CANUC:H.
4. Ensure that teacher preparation programs and hiring practices include standards to achieve success in the foregoing.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

Initially the Provincial/Territorial Ministry of Education in direct consultation with parents, consumer groups, CNIB, teacher preparation programs, teachers, and technical experts.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The full cost is unknown. It will vary across the country and be more in jurisdictions where these services are poor and non-existent.



## **G. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Library Systems**

Libraries are a major focus for information access. As repositories of literature, history, research and culture, they must provide access to Canada's wealth of information for all citizens.

The network of libraries in Canada includes massive collections in academic institutions, in government, in industry, and in community Public Libraries. Some libraries in this system contain alternate media materials, however it is not a well advertised nor known service.

The National Library of Canada's 1988 "*Special Format Resource Sharing*" paints a fragmented picture of the sharing of resources among academic, public, special and education libraries. There is great disparity from province to province and from region to region. These disparities are multiplied for library services to those unable to read print.

Technical support systems and modern library management techniques make the consolidation of these collections far more possible. However, the Task Force is concerned that these materials are not consolidated and therefore additional, unnecessary duplicate production will be the inevitable result.

The Task Force discovered that very few libraries surveyed offered alternate media for their blind or visually impaired customers. Further, even fewer libraries provide access devices so that the regular print collection is available to the visually impaired user. Consumers surveyed who had technical access devices, such as closed-circuit television reading systems or electronic speech output print scanners available through the library, were overwhelmingly grateful for the opportunity to read personal printed matter and print items from the library. Many of the respondents would otherwise not be able to do so; their resources are too limited to independently acquire the equipment.

The not-for-profit sector libraries such as those of CNIB and Institut Nazareth et Louis Braille provide extensive complementary service in braille and audio formats.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

9. *that libraries must establish access to information for blind and visually impaired Canadians as an immediate priority.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. Every library in Canada expands its collection of alternate material by:
  - a) designating a percentage of acquisition budgets for special format materials;
  - b) listing all current holdings on the CANUC:H Database of the National Library of Canada;
  - c) ensuring that all new publications are likewise listed;
  - d) cooperating with the inter-library loan system for materials listed on the Database; and,
  - e) recognizing CNIB and INLB as braille lending libraries for English and French, respectively.
2. The National Library of Canada must examine its mandate with a view to expanding its services to disabled persons and develop a system to handle Inter-Library Loans of special format material, especially multilingual materials.
3. Libraries should work with local visually impaired consumers and agencies for visually impaired persons to:
  - a) establish more active use of the library; and,
  - b) secure advice on the acquisition of technical access devices to be used by these patrons.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

All libraries in Canada, the library regulatory bodies, consumer groups and service agencies.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The cost for these initiatives is unknown.



## **H. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - Innovative Present and Future Systems**

The evaluation of any complex system requires the examination of its components independently. While the system is dynamic, capturing the detail requires the evaluators to "take a snap shot" of the system. In so doing, the impact of unique and/or isolated processes is potentially overlooked or misunderstood.

Establishing access to information for blind and visually impaired persons is a complex process. The Task Force has tried to "stop time" in order to review the major elements of this process as they exist "now". However, time does not stop and dynamic systems require evaluation that provides for anticipated growth and change in the influence of currently unique and/or isolated processes.

Through the course of their deliberations and investigations, the Task Force established that there are several innovative processes and techniques that exist, are evolving, or are merely anticipated. The following is a list of some of these interesting and novel systems:

***Descriptive Video*** - Developed by Dr. and Mr. Pfanstiehl of Washington D.C., it provides oral descriptions of the non-verbal activities in live or television productions. The visually impaired person is provided with special earphones for a production and during a non-verbal scene, the action is described over the earphones. The originators are also looking to movie producers for inclusion of their system.

***DISC (Disabled Information Services Centre)*** - Established by the University of Calgary with financial assistance from the Federal Secretary of State, this specialized communication system provides disabled computer users with the opportunity to communicate with each other, to have access to vast information storage facilities, and to enhance their computer skills. It is an innovative program but limited by cost and the skill of the user.

***RADTS (Radio Transferred Talking Newspapers for the Blind)*** - Established in Sweden, this system allows the distribution of a daily newspaper directly from the originating publisher's computer over an FM radio signal to the blind person's home. Once in the home, the radio signal is converted by a personal computer to braille or speech output devices for access by the visually impaired reader.

***Audio Juke Box*** - This is a process of using pre-recorded material, the telephone and a computer in order to provide external access to the material, independently. The material is recorded onto tape or laser disk and indexed under computer control. The user calls the computer, requests an indexed subject, and listens to the information. This system could be very useful with laser disk technology, often too expensive for individual use.



**ISDN (Integrated Digital Services Network)** - This is a concept that is expected to be a reality within five years. The concept is to incorporate all means of data transmission into one common environment. Using the growing telephone technology of fibre optics, the increasing sophistication of computer text and graphic transmission and communication satellite services, ISDN is expected to become the next communication technology breakthrough.

All of these processes can and will have an impact on information access for blind and visually impaired people in Canada and the world. They must be viewed and monitored in that context. Also, those listed are only the ones that the Task Force discovered prior to preparing the report.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

10. *that the Information Access Implementation Group must ensure that appropriate monitoring and assessment of growing and new technologies be regularly conducted.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

Ensure that a research and evaluation component be established to monitor communication technologies by:

- a) seeking consultation with industry leaders;
- b) establishing a forum for research; and,
- c) encouraging existing communication systems to actively seek contributions from product and process designers.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

Information Access Implementation Group, consumers, government research agencies, universities and service agencies.

## **ESTIMATED COST:**

The cost is unknown.

## **I. THE RIGHT TO KNOW - The Next Step**

As evidenced by the scope and magnitude of the recommendations contained in the preceding elements of this document, establishing and maintaining access to information for blind and visually impaired Canadians must begin immediately. A concerted effort to incorporate the views and goals of blind and visually impaired citizens, their service providing associates, government at all levels, and the communication and broadcast industry must be established.

It is the view of the Task Force that the *Information Access Implementation Group (IAIG)* should be the initial vehicle for consolidating representation from the necessary partners and for establishing the priorities for implementing the recommendations of "*The Right to Know*". This group becomes the implementation extension of the Task Force and would use the Task Force's plan as its guide through the organizational phase of implementation for each of the recommendations.

A selection of participants is then required. For continuity, some representation should be from interested and available members of this Task Force, all of whom satisfy representative membership requirements suggested by this report. The membership should subsequently select their chairperson and immediately set out to prioritize their tasks.

Although all of the recommendations are vital, the Task Force feels that the IAIG must address the Broadcast Reading Service as a fundamental undertaking for establishing access to information. The Task Force is convinced that this service is crucial to overall success of the plan. A National Broadcast Reading Service initiates the basic flow of information currently unavailable to blind and visually impaired persons and by so doing creates a forum through which further processes can be developed and uniquely tailored for the specific information access demands detailed in "*The Right to Know*".

### **ESTIMATED COST:**

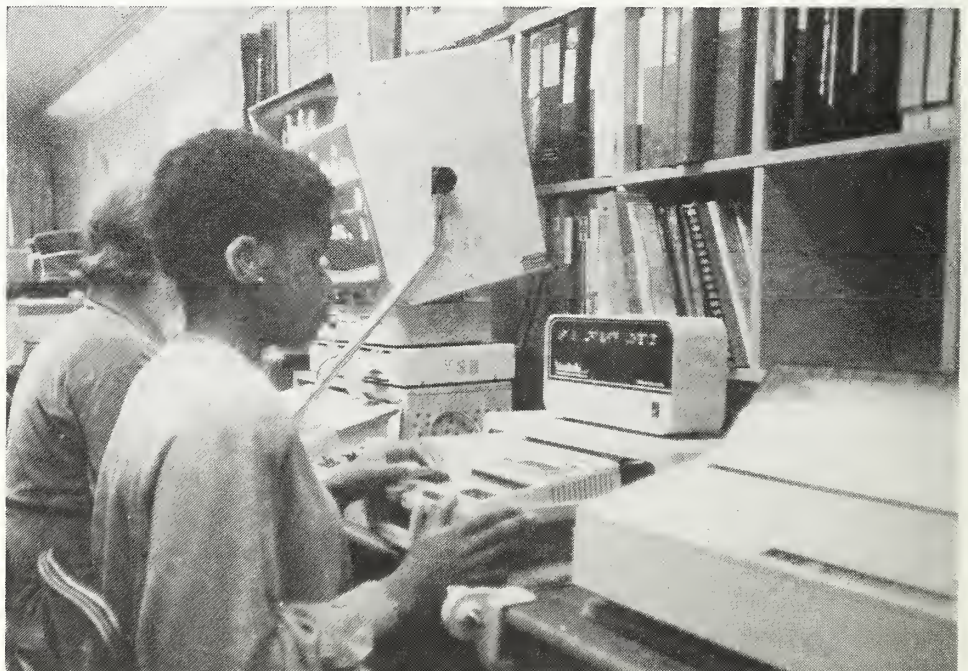
The projected cost for the IAIG for five years is \$250,000.00.





Braille is a well-known but under-used resource for blind persons. For learning, note-taking or controlling sophisticated computers, braille is an international standard for communication that must be fostered.

**A high school student preparing a class assignment on a braille word processor.**





## **APPENDIX I**

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